

- (c) whether any consultations with the National Commission for Women and the Ministry of Women and Child Development have been held; and
(d) if so, the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The revised guidance booklet on "Marriages to Overseas Indians" was released by the Hon'ble Prime Minister during Pravasi Bhartiya Divas, 2007 on 7th January, 2007.

(c) and (d) MOIA held consultations with NCW to discuss the problems relating to NRI marriages. It was decided to organize joint regional workshops in the States concerned to create awareness amongst the prospective brides and their parents. Consequently, MOIA in collaboration with NCW, organized two regional workshops, one in Chandigarh and the other in Thiruvananthapuram, in this regard. The report on the two workshops is being finalized.

Augmenting capacity of women Panchayat heads

339. SHRIMATI SUPRIYA SULE: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

- (a) whether in a move to strengthen the country's women Panchayat heads, his Ministry has approached the National Commission for Women to help them augment their capacity as elected representatives;
- (b) if so, whether the NCW have agreed for a close-cooperations with his Ministry;
- (c) whether his Ministry is also working on a plan to capitalize on the Commission's expertise to achieve this end; and
- (d) if so, whether the Commission is also considering providing support to these bodies to identify the right NGOs and experts to assist them?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKARAIYAR):
(a) Yes Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Yes, Sir. Details are at Statement. (See below).

(d) Yes Sir. A draft Memorandum of Understanding between the

Commission and the Ministry of Panchayati Raj is under preparation. The Commission have agreed in principle to provide Training Support in Legal Awareness to women Panchayati Raj representatives through selected NGOs, both in terms of financial and human resources.

Statement

The Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan

The Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan—a movement to strengthen the elected women of the PRIs-has been initiated under the aegis of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and a "Chalo Gaon Ki Ore" rubric of the National Commission for Women. A core group comprising selected EWRs, activists, academics etc. is nominated by the State Government/Government of India to draft and facilitate the draft women's charter. Subsequently, all women Zila Pramukhs, all women Pradhans and selected women Sarpanchs from each district of the state, as well as Core Group members and some eminent personalities are invited to the said two day conference of panchayat women. A women's charter comprising all the major points distilled from the discussions with the women representatives of the PRIs is then finalized.

The Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan has been conceptualized to initiate awareness about the gender issues in governance and to facilitate Elected Women Representatives in performing their mandate to the best of their abilities. Most EWRs see themselves as isolated and unorganized, functioning without a support of structure and have spoken of the need to form into groups or associations so as to be part of a forum that addresses their special needs in a largely male-dominated social and political milieu. So far, conferences of elected women representatives, activists, NGOs eminent personalities have been held as under:—

1. Udaipur (Rajasthan)-24th & 25th April, 2006.
2. Patiala (Punjab)-17th & 18th July, 2006.
3. Bangalore (Karnataka) 5th September, 2006.
4. Dehradun (Uttaranchal) on 24th September, 2006.
5. Imphal (Manipur)-4th & 5th October, 2006.
6. Panaji (Goa)-19th October, 2006.

Besides the State-level Conferences, a one-day divisional-level conference was also held on 29th November, 2006 at Jaipur in Rajasthan. In the State of Sikkim the conference will be held on 20 and 21st April 2007 at Gangtok. Such conferences are planned for other states as well.

Panchayat elections

340. SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that the Task Force on Panchayati Raj Jurisprudence had recommended that Panchayat elections at all the three tiers be not held on party basis;
- (b) whether it is also a fact that the said Task Force had recommended regularizing elections every five years and uniform procedure throughout the country; and
- (c) if so, the views of Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKARAIYAR):
(a) to (c) Yes Sir, The Task Force on Jurisprudence for Panchayati Raj Institutions in its report recommended, *Inter alia*, that Panchayat elections to all the three tiers should not be held on a party basis. The Task Force has also held that elections should be held regularly in a five year period with a uniform procedural pattern throughout the country. The report is under examination in the Ministry and the Government has not accepted the first recommendation.

District planning committees

341. SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that many States have failed to set up district planning committees;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether it is also a fact that several States are unlikely to receive money under the Backward Regions Grant Fund; and